



# RECENT ASPECTS OF MATERIALISM :

BEING

## A LECTURE

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BY

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### PREFATORY NOTE.

As the following Lecture may be read by Students who have waited upon my instructions it may be proper to state that the arguments advanced against Materialism were delivered *in substance* in the Class-room three years ago, and in several respects more fully developed than in their present form.

The discussions of the subject which have taken place within the last year have not lead me to abandon any of the fundamental positions before assumed.

## MATERIALISM.

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Materialism is based on the assumption that no satisfactory or conclusive proof can be offered of the existence of mind. This is the old Sadducean doctrine, but its modern advocates put it forward in the form of discovery, as a new thing, and profess to establish it upon the ruins of all other systems of mental Science and Theology. It was taught in substance by Epicurus long before its appearance in Germany as the offspring of Hegelian Philosophy. It was promoted, unintentionally no doubt, by Locke in his attempt to account for the origin of all our ideas through Sensation and Reflection. And recently John Stuart Mill in his theory of Association, Prof. Bain by tracing our thoughts and even our moral apprehensions very much to our bodily organism, Herbert Spencer by his Evolution theory, and Prof. Huxley in his discussion of Protoplasm or the physical basis of life, have lent powerful aid to Materialism. Along with these and other popular writers may be classed certain divines who profess to have read extensively in Science and Theology without finding any proof of the independent and continued existence of the human soul, or of spirit. On the contrary they confidently appeal to God's Word and to Philosophy to show that at death what is popularly called the soul becomes instantly and utterly extinct.

You can easily see how such opinions are fitted to make havoc of Theology and to set aside our most cherished hopes for time and eternity. If there is no soul to be saved or lost then manifestly the activities of the Christian world have been hitherto misdirected and worse than useless. The record of the gospel cannot be accepted as anything more than a romance and its fundamental doctrines as to sin, atonement, eternal glory, or eternal punishment must be treated as empty delusions. If man is an animal and nothing more, destined to be utterly annihilated at death, then why the restraints of morality, why this struggle to escape the tyranny of what is coarse and base and unholy? Nothing can be unholy. There is neither right nor wrong. The best thing for man is to gratify his desires in all respects,—“to eat, drink and be merry,”—to give loose rein to all his passions. If there exists no independent Creative Spirit apart from matter how are we to account for the phenomena of the universe? We must ascribe to blind “molecular force,” the forethought, the wisdom and the power usually attributed to God in producing his innumerable and marvellous works. Our whole religious vocabulary must be changed; we must learn to speak of a good, a wise, a holy, and a powerful “force,” and cease to apply such terms to an Infinite, Intelligent Spirit. But it may be asked, is our country being invaded by such opinions as these? Most assuredly. They come to us from European and American sources. Any false science, or Theological opinion, which becomes dominant in the Old World is sure gradually to reach our homes and corrupt our faith; and already such that is unsafe and positively injurious is in free circulation among the reading classes of our people. I propose, therefore, to state and criticise a few of the positions of modern Materialists. The limits as-

signed to my remarks oblige me to select only a few fundamental utterances from these authors ; but let them speak for themselves. Here are their words :

"The brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile." "Thought stands in the same relation to the brain as bile to the liver." To the same effect are the words of Büchner in his book on "force and matter." "The soul is the product of a peculiar combination of matter." "In the same manner as the steam engine produces motion so does the organic combination of force-endowed material produce in the animal body a sum of effects so interwoven as to become a unit, and is then by us called spirit." \* \* "Mental activity is a function of the cerebral substance." "It is emitted by the brain as sounds are by the mouth, as music by the organ."

Along with these statements may be taken others of similar import by Bain and Huxley. The former says : "The arguments for the two substances, mind and matter, have, we believe, now entirely lost their force. They are no longer compatible with ascertained science and clear thinking. The one substance with two sets of properties, two sides—the physical side and mental side—a double faced unity, would appear to comply with all the exigencies of the case."

The words of Huxley are ; "It may seem a small thing to admit that the dull vital actions of a fungus, or a foraminifer, are the properties of their protoplasm, and are the direct results of the nature of the matter of which they are composed. But if, as I have endeavored to prove to you, their protoplasm is essentially identical with, and most readily converted into, that of any animal, I can discover no logical halting place between the admission that such is the case and the further concession that all vital action may, with equal propriety, be said to be the result of the molecular forces of the protoplasm which displays it. And if so, it must be true, in the same sense, and to the same extent, that the thoughts to which I am now giving utterance, and your thoughts regarding them are the expression of molecular changes in that matter of life which is the source of our other vital phenomena."

With respect to the criticism which these propositions are likely to evoke, Huxley adds ; "They will be condemned by many zealous persons, and perhaps by some few of the wise and thoughtful." "I should not wonder if gross and brutal materialism were the mildest phrase applied to them in certain quarters. And most undoubtedly the terms of the propositions are distinctly materialistic. Nevertheless two things are certain ; the one, that I hold the statements to be substantially true ; the other, that I, individually, am no materialist, but on the contrary, believe materialism to involve grave philosophical error." There is surely inconsistency here if not something worse. It seems like trifling with our common sense for Huxley to ask us to regard him as "No materialist," while he professedly uses propositions distinctly materialistic, which he declares to be "substantially true." He does, indeed, seek to explain the use of "Materialistic terminology as consistent, with the repudiation of materialistic philosophy." But how are we to know a man's meaning except by his words ? The propositions of his creed, if honestly held, determine the class to which he belongs—The fact is, as has been well said, that "Huxley is a Humist, and believes neither in mind nor matter as substances." But the proof of this is not to be found in any very frank or categorical indorsement of Hume's doctrine, but rather in the eulogies pronounced by Huxley upon his favorite author. For example ; "Hume called himself a sceptic,"



but we are assured that he was nothing of the sort,—“the name, with its existing implications, does him gross injustice.” “The fundamental doctrines of Materialism like those of Spiritualism and most other “isms,” lie outside the limits of Philosophical inquiry, and David Hume’s great service to humanity is his irrefragable demonstration of what these limits are.” And so, in other passages which celebrate the praises of the Scottish sceptic and his views. But suppose we allow Huxley to call himself what he pleases; the vital point to be determined is this, is his doctrine true? Assuredly not. In his theory of “the physical basis of life,” he reasons in a circle, and this alone, I need not say, is fatal to all his labors in the matter. “No known plant,” he says, “can live upon the uncompounded elements of protoplasm.” And after illustrating this fully, he adds, “An animal cannot make protoplasm, but must take it ready-made from some other animal, or some plant — the animal’s highest feat of constructive chemistry being to convert dead protoplasm into that living matter of life which is appropriate to itself. Therefore, in seeking for the origin of protoplasm, we must eventually turn to the vegetable world.” That is to say, the plant cannot live without protoplasm; and hence protoplasm must exist *before the plant* in order to sustain its existence; but then, on the other hand, the plant alone manufactures protoplasm; and hence the plant must exist *before this mysterious and most convenient substance, protoplasm*. There is thus no starting point, no First Cause for that which is advanced to account for all mental as well as physical activity. And here precisely is the grand difficulty which attaches to all the theories of the men of this school. They do not seem to be willing frankly to say that there is no Great First Cause possessed of infinite intelligence and power, but they certainly fail to recognize such in any intelligible manner in their doctrine. Atheism in some form is at the foundation of all scepticism. But let me defer further criticism until we hear these men more fully. Take now what has been designated, “a more refined, but not less dangerous form of materialism,” (McCosh,) as taught by Dr. Maudesley of the Manchester Royal Lunatic Hospital. The surroundings and occupation of this physician seem to determine the fundamental principles of his philosophy. Being led by professional duties to make many observations on the influence of a diseased brain on the operations of the mind, and to witness many forms of mental aberration, he naturally glides to the startling conclusions that the soul is not a unit, except in the same sense as a house or a tree being formed of an aggregate of constituent elements; and that absolute veracity is not the distinguishing characteristic of our consciousness. These positions being accepted, it is easy to see why in his estimation, “mental science to be truly inductive must be studied objectively.” This has been Maudesley’s method; and here, in his own words, is the extraordinary result at which he arrives. “Is it not supremely absurd that while we cannot trust consciousness, as to whether we are hot or cold, we should be content to rely entirely on its evidence, in the complex phenomena of our highest mental activity?” Allow me to say in passing, that I fail to see how this is “a more refined form of materialism” than that of the other authors referred to. It is certainly most reckless and untenable. It makes a clean sweep of all knowledge. The dissolution of “brain cells” at death, according to the Doctor, makes an end of what we are accustomed to call the soul. It is then separated into its parts. But more than this, as we shall show when we come to the general discussion of these theories con-

jointly, it is impossible for us, on the doctrine propounded, to have any reliable knowledge as to "brain cells" or anything else.

Meanwhile, I add another name to the list of those under review, a name of weight deservedly in matters of science. I allude to Prof. Tyndall.—I could wish that it were impossible even to suspect him of being in sympathy with Materialists, but he has undoubtedly expressed himself rashly and unwisely on prayer and other religious subjects, and as to Materialism, his opinion is, "that for every fact of consciousness whether in the domain of sense thought or emotion a certain definite molecular condition is set up in the brain, and that this relation of physics to consciousness is invariable, so that given the state of the brain, the corresponding thought or feeling might be inferred, and *vice versa*." In other words, the most complicated spiritual experience through which a man can pass may be explained by the state of his brain.—If so there is no need of predicating the existence of spirit or soul. Take an example. Suppose a man thoroughly godless, regardless of the Bible and eternity, freely obeying his wicked passions. He comes to this church next sabbath—listens to the message of life through Jesus Christ. The Spirit of God comes down upon his soul and he is saved. On Monday he passes out into the world and is sorely tempted to abandon principle and truth. He falls upon his knees and cries to God for help—pours out his soul in intense prayer.—God grants him grace and deliverance. What a varied and intricate experience. Yet all this is to be explained by a certain molecular condition of the brain! The very statement of such a doctrine seems to be a sufficient refutation of it.

Here I must terminate my recital of materialistic opinions and proceed to indicate generally what may be said in refutation of them.

It has been hinted already that *no true system of morals can be deduced from materialism*. How is this? I can answer only in a few words and without illustrating my views on this whole subject. It must be conceded by all that there is an eternal right, the basis of which is found in the Divine nature. In the Scriptures and in the character of Jesus Christ we have this standard of right distinctly exhibited, or God's nature revealed. Virtue consists in conformity to this standard. Man possesses the power of cognizing right and wrong, this is the office of conscience. These propositions, I believe, can be shown to be incontrovertible. But materialism ignores them altogether. By the abnegation of soul or spirit all the facts of our moral nature are set aside, and yet let us not forget that these are more truly distinctive of man than mental phenomena which may be regarded as participated in by the lower animals. If destitute of a soul how can we have the idea of right and wrong? There is nothing right or wrong in mere sensation, in a "certain molecular condition of the brain" or any other part of our physical organism. The pain, for example, which you suffer on having a wound inflicted upon your person, or in undergoing a surgical operation, is neither right nor wrong, it merely indicates a certain state of body. If therefore, in our philosophy, we are to be limited to the body or to what is material, we must give up the distinction between right and wrong, or virtue and vice. But further, the consciousness of free agency, which is possessed by all men, and which is indispensable in order to our being praise worthy or blame-worthy, virtuous or vicious, is thoroughly ignored by Materialism. Nor is this surprising, for how can we be free if all vital and mental phenomena are to be ascribed to certain chemical forces? These forces act absolutely,

and hence we have no more freedom than the stream of the St. Lawrence as it descends in its Channel to the Ocean. But our consciousness protests against such a doctrine. Every man, good or bad, knows that he is a free agent and all the arguments that may be accumulated by Materialists and others will not convince him of the contrary. Let this suffice on the first issue raised, and let us take up another position, viz. *that the theory we are combating fails to account for the well known phenomena of our spiritual nature.* Waiving for a moment the question of the origin of thought, look at some of the most manifest results of our being able to think. These are everywhere apparent. We see the world filled with commerce and industry, books and paintings and sculptures,—the highest creations of genius. Are all these to be ascribed to "molecular force?" And can we, as intimated at the outset, by appealing to the same secondary cause, dispense with a Wise, Designing and All-powerful Spirit to create, adorn and rule the heavens and the earth? On the contrary the fact is that secondary causes have no efficiency when entirely separated from the Great First Cause. But let us take the specific case submitted, the very origin of thought. It is said that bile and thought are manufactured in the same way. But what are the facts? In the one case we have the liver coming in contact with certain substances and from these and itself it produces another substance called bile. In other words, you have a crucible you throw certain things into it, they are dissolved, and the result is a certain product named bile. In the other case you have a "soft pulpy substance" named brain. It contains no thought, neither in its constituent elements nor in all these united. Suppose we add phosphorus, as Materialists desire, still this contains no thought. The most reckless theorist will shrink from affirming that it does. What follows? That taking the two, brain and phosphorous, together, "there is in the effect," as has been well said, "something not in the cause." And as to "the loose analogy," as it has been happily termed, respecting the organ and music it is sufficient to say that it utterly fails! The part of the organ is to produce certain vibrations in the air, but the music and its appropriate feelings belong to the mind and not to wooden or metallic pipes. It seems manifestly absurd to attempt to refer the qualities of mind and matter to the same substance "a two faced unity" as proposed by Prof. Bain. The qualities are totally diverse. In matter we have extension, attraction impenetrability, etc. In mind we have thought, volition, moral perception, etc. We know that matter is capable of being expanded and contracted by heat and cold. But is the mind, the Ego, the thinking being, extended, capable of division, swayed by gravitation or subject to expansion and contraction under varying temperatures? Every man's consciousness revolts against such a doctrine and there is no higher authority than that of consciousness to which we can appeal.

Let me now pass on to another position as against Materialists, and one which if accepted, makes an end of their theories. *Mind and Matter, the Ego and non-Ego, are directly and distinctly apprehended as related to each other as factors in every act of consciousness.* Both are cognized at the same moment, and we have the same evidence of the reality of both. I am never conscious of the qualities of matter, of what is not self, without the simultaneous consciousness of self as related to it. Thus consciousness gives me plurality of existences, a fact which is fatal both to Materialism and Pantheism, which, in my opinion, furnishes the basis of a true philosophic refutation of



both. Neither of them can be accepted so long as consciousness testifies to the existence of these two independent factors, mind and matter. Does it not accord with your common sense that mind does most assuredly distinguish itself from its surroundings? When you walk through the city, and see our Mountain, so called, the magnificent houses that adorn its side, the Victoria Bridge, our churches and ware-houses, is it not impossible for you to confound these objective realities with yourself? No less clearly does the soul distinguish itself from the matter more closely related to it as its bodily organism. In fact, unless these two can be distinguished from each other, viz. the cognizing subject, and the object cognized, knowledge is impossible. But if I am asked to define specifically what is meant by the subject, or the substance called mind, I cannot answer better than in the words of one who has ably discussed this point. "It has being, it has power to act, and it has permanency, that is continues to exist independent of your thoughts concerning it. Both mind and matter possess these qualities. We may be able to say little about mind. We can say little concerning any thing that is simple. I know it exists by every act of self-consciousness. I know it has power,—it exercises it over other things, over its own thoughts and over the bodily frame. Moreover I know it has permanency; it is not a mere idea created by certain forces and passing away when I cease to think of it. But if the mind, like the body has these three qualities,—being, potency, permanency—it is a substance." This conclusion however depends on another step which we must now take in our argument, specially against Dr. Maudesley, viz. *that the veracity of consciousness cannot be impeached; and for this reason universal scepticism is impossible, it is self-destructive.*

In attempting to nullify our faith in consciousness Dr. Maudesley destroys the foundation of all his own arguments. If we grant him that for which he contends we can no longer give credit to any of his statements. If consciousness is not reliable, if "all men are liars," if the very root of our nature is a lie, how can we accept the testimony of the person who gives us this unwelcome information? Plainly, according to the doctrine advanced, we can have no confidence in our senses,—the trustworthiness of these must fall along with the veracity of consciousness,—and yet do not the very persons whose views we are combating constantly assume that their senses are reliable, if not infallible, while employed in conducting the manipulations of physical science?

But here is another grave error in the reasoning of this author in this connection, and one which seems to have escaped the notice of his severest critics. It is an error into which many have fallen, and which has led to no small confusion and controversy in philosophy. *It consists in confounding consciousness with a process of discursive thought; or in attributing to consciousness what in no sense or manner belongs to it.* Take the example referred to by Dr. Maudesley. "A man suffering from vertigo supposes that the world turns round." Grant that this is the testimony of a person thus afflicted. This is not a deliverance of consciousness pure and simple, this is a conclusion arrived at inferentially, and its validity or non-validity has nothing to do with the question in hand. Because the sick man's logic is at fault, it surely does not necessarily follow that his consciousness is mendacious. And so in many other cases referred to.—Both sane men and lunatics may be utterly wrong in their logical processes, but in spite of these failures I cling to the old doctrine

held by all sound Metaphysicians, that the pure data of consciousness are high above suspicion; they admit neither of doubt nor demonstration,

Once more, and finally, so far as philosophical arguments are concerned, *Materialism contradicts our strong and indistructible consciousness of personality.* Each of you feels that he is an individual and as such incapable of division like a piece of matter. You cannot think of yourself as separated into parts, your consciousness is one and not two or three. And when you speak of memory, or judgment, or imagination you cannot regard these as parts of an object composed of a congeries of things. On the contrary, *you, the indivisible being*, remember, judge and imagine. I grant that you can readily conceive of the dismemberment of your physical organism, but not of the disintegration of your soul. The consciousness of its unity is carried with us through all the changes from infancy to old age, and abides with us even in the last throes of physical dissolution, the soul asserting its individuality above the wreck of the mere material frame. Interrogate a person the very last moment before death and he will tell you that he has this consciousness as strong as at any previous period of his existence. This is the last you *know* of him. And can you fairly say anything beyond what you *know* in the case? Assuredly not. And hence if any one will venture to affirm that the soul becomes extinct at death he affirms that of which in the nature of the case he must be absolutely ignorant. And this, you observe, narrows our controversy to a single point, viz. shall we abandon as chimerical that of which we are fully assured by the consciousness of every moment and rest our creed upon that of which we have, and can have, *no knowledge*, so far as philosophy is concerned? Assuredly not. Let Materialists advance the negation, "*no soul.*" We answer, it is utterly incapable of proof and must therefore be rejected, while the opposite can be fully established, and forces itself upon our acceptance.

And now, in bringing my discussions to a close, let me shew, briefly, *that the results thus arrived at philosophically are fully sustained by the teachings of Scripture.*

This argument, which to many minds is by far the most satisfactory, might be extended to great length, but I must limit myself for the present to a few passages. It is scarcely necessary to remind you that the view presented of God as the Great First Cause, as absolutely independent of what is material, as the Intelligent Author and Ruler of all things, is the uniform doctrine of the Bible. The very opening words in the volume are decisive in this respect. "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*" Here the two, the Creating Spirit and the things created are clearly distinguished from each other. And, I believe, that just as in consciousness we apprehend soul and body so with equal certainty do we cognize God as the Supreme, the only Cause of our being. "*In him we live, and move, and have our being*" (Acts xvii 28) And if this be so, you may see, in passing, that demonstrations or logical proofs of the being of God add nothing to the certainty of our belief in this fundamental doctrine. On the contrary a logical process admits of error and thus far may unsettle our creed while the very semblance of error is totally excluded from the pure deliverance of consciousness.

Need I remind you, too, that the propositions laid down as furnishing a basis for a true system of morals are fully recognized in the Bible? No one can have any hesitation in saying that it most emphatically declares that there

is an eternal distinction between right and wrong, that there is a standard of right, and that its basis is in the divine nature. "None is good, save one, that is God." (Luke xviii 19). Then as to the spiritual element in our nature it is both assumed and asserted throughout revelation. It is incredible that God would have done all he is represented as having accomplished for the salvation of souls if there were no souls to redeem.

He would not have given his Son, delivered Him up to suffering and death, or sent his Spirit, or set on foot the whole economy of Redemption for the sake of an evanescent breath. If the soul were not something, essentially distinct from the body, having an independent existence, why do the Scriptures tell us that we are dwelling in houses of clay? Peter says, "I think it meet as long as I am in this tabernacle to stir you up by putting you in remembrance." But if soul and body are identical, one substance with two faces as Prof. Bain thinks, how can Peter speak of dwelling in the body as a tabernacle? We are told that we shall be rewarded "according to the deeds done in the body;" and we are enjoined to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit." We are warned against "fleshly lusts that war against the soul"; and Paul speaks of being "absent from the body and present with the Lord." Expressions which are unintelligible on any other doctrine than that soul and body now exist as united, and can exist in a state of separation from each other. And this doctrine is placed beyond doubt by certain matters of fact related by Jesus Christ as well as by his direct teaching. You all know that He denounced the doctrine of the Sadducees, who denied the existence of the soul and of angels, as utterly erroneous. And you remember his representation regarding the rich man who "died and was buried"—this burial disposed of one part of his nature, his body—but after this was done, his conscious existence was continued—for "in hell he lifted up his eyes being in torments." And let us not imagine that we get quit of the force of this proof by declaring that the Saviour merely relates a parable; granting this to be the case, no parable does violence to matters of fact. You recollect, too, the record in connection with the resurrection of Jairus' daughter—"her spirit came again and she arose straightway." The meaning is obvious. her spirit was away, absent from her body and it continued to exist for some time in that separate state, but was recalled and reunited with her body by the omnipotent power of Jesus Christ.

Need I cite further proof? Is not one solid argument as good as a hundred? Ye let me refer to another text, Mat. x. 28. "Fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." This and kindred texts have been employed by materialists to teach the doctrine of annihilation. They assert that "to destroy" means to annihilate, and that death and annihilation are identical. They bring forward in support of this position such passages as these—"the end of the wicked is destruction," "Vessels of wrath fitted to destruction." "When the workers of iniquity do flourish, it is that they may be destroyed forever." "If any man defile the temple of God him shall God destroy." "Broad is the way that leadeth to destruction." All these, and many similar passages are held to teach that "to destroy" and "destruction" are precisely the same thing as to annihilate and annihilation. But what is completely fatal to this view is the fact that the Saviour himself employs the very same word in the Greek which is translated "to destroy" or "destruction," in cases where the idea of annihilation is utterly absurd and impossible. Thus he sends his disciples to the

"lost sheep of the house of Israel." Literally the *destroyed* sheep, or as materialists wish us to translate it, the *annihilated* sheep of the house of Israel.

And, Christ himself came to "seek and to save the lost," literally the *destroyed*, or the *annihilated*. What follows? That Jesus sent his disciples to preach to *annihilated* persons, and that he himself came to save those who had no existence.

But it is alleged that death and annihilation are identical. What follows in this case? If death be annihilation there can be neither enjoyment nor suffering *after death*, or, after what is said to be its equivalent, *annihilation*. If a man is annihilated he can be neither happy nor miserable thereafter but the Bible uniformly places very much of the blessedness of the saints and the misery of the wicked after death. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; yea saith the spirit that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them" (Rev. xiv 13.) And the Saviour closes his account of the final judgment in these words, which describe what is to take place after death and the resurrection, and cover the case of godly and ungodly men. "An these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal"

I conclude therefore, that death is not annihilation. In fact annihilation is to me something inconceivable, unthinkable, alike opposed to common sense, science and revelation. The truth is, that nothing perishes in this sense; and man cannot become utterly extinct. "The dust shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."